

E

458

.1

.F98

Furness, W. H.

England and America.

A discourse delivered... Sunday,
December 22, 1861.

... Philadelphia, 1861.



Class E 458

Book F 98



ENGLAND AND AMERICA

A

DISCOURSE

DELIVERED BY

W. H. FURNESS

MINISTER OF THE

FIRST CONGREGATIONAL UNITARIAN CHURCH

SUNDAY DECEMBER 22 1861

C. Sherman & Son,

Printers, Philada.

[NOT PUBLISHED.]

158
881

41

E 452

.1

.F 98

Exchange
West. Hist. Soc.

DISCOURSE.

JAMES III. 11.

“DOTH A FOUNTAIN SEND FORTH AT THE SAME PLACE SWEET WATER
AND BITTER?”

IN the great voyage upon which we and all that we hold dear are embarked we have suddenly drifted on to a storm-tossed sea, where the billows rage and battle with one another, a perfect maelstrom; for here and now two deep, strong currents, running in opposite directions, have met, and the foundations of the world are trembling with the violence of the concussion. The one current clear and sweet with the imperishable and life-giving element of Freedom, the other thick and bitter with the foul corruption of human Bondage,—both sent forth from the same spring. Two hundred and forty-one years ago this day, the first company of Christian freemen landed at the North. Two hundred and forty-one years ago this very year, the first company of Slaves was brought to the Virginian shore, and the blessing and the curse came from the same source. England is the fountain of Northern Freedom and of Southern Slavery. England is the spring that has sent forth sweet water and bitter.

This December day is, indeed, a most memorable anniversary. We may well pause and ponder the events which it recalls, insignificant as they were at the time of their occurrence, but momentous in the consequences which are now flowing from them with such fearful activity as we witness, involving revolutions, broad and deep, in human affairs, the extent of which no human wisdom can foresee. We naturally turn to the events which the day calls to mind and revert to their origin.

England, I repeat, bestowed these two gifts, Liberty and Slavery, on this new world. Liberty she gave reluctantly.

The men who brought it hither were driven by persecution from her shores. And that they were enabled to preserve the sacred gift amidst the horrors of the wilderness was owing to no fostering help of hers. She cared not if they perished. Not until they began to grow in numbers and in strength did she take any notice of them, and then she extended her arm to them only to make them feel its oppressive weight, and to crush the liberty which her outcast children had brought to these shores.

But that other and fatal gift of African bondage she fastened on this Northern continent with a willing hand, in opposition to the wishes, the conscience, and the humanity of these then infant colonies. In the original draft of the Declaration of our National Independence, it was formally stated, as you know, as one of the causes justifying that Declaration, that the British King had insisted upon establishing this accursed interest on this soil; accursed indeed, because, while it brought material wealth, its inevitable effect was from the very first to corrupt the hearts of the people by so inflaming the lust of gain and of power as to deprave their natural sense of justice and humanity.

Such is briefly the record of the past in regard to the relation to this country of British power acting through its civil organization. And now, after two centuries and a half, England is again, to all appearances, preparing to assume the position of protecting the bondage of the African in this land. Flinging behind her the great pledges she gave of her obligations to the Cause of Human Freedom by the Abolition of the Slave trade more than fifty years ago, and by the Emancipation of her West Indian colonies thirty years ago, she is committing herself to an alliance with the flagrant rebellion against God and man, which threatens, not only the existence of this nation, but Human Rights everywhere. Already her influence has wrought to infuse into this atrocious treason against mankind the strength which alone has enabled it to live to this hour. Long before this the slaveholders' revolt would

have come to a miserable end had it not been animated by the hope that with the rich bribe of Southern cotton it would soon be able to purchase the powerful help of English recognition. This was one of the two grounds of reliance upon which the Southern leaders dared to commit the overt act of treason. Who believes that they would have ventured to perpetrate the outrage save in the confident expectation of Northern sympathy and foreign recognition, the recognition of England most especially? The hope of the first, of the sympathy of a Northern party, was blown to atoms by the first gun discharged against Fort Sumter. And the hope of the other, the recognition of England, would have been shivered in like manner if England, true to her grand position as the Abolisher of the Slave trade and the Emancipator of Slaves, had held herself grossly insulted by so much as the faintest hint of a proposition to recognize as a sister nation a community formally planting itself upon the lawfulness of buying and selling human beings. She should have scorned the idea, as she would the proposal to reinstate the Algerines or to acknowledge the independence of any colony of buccaneers. This, and nothing less than this, she owed instantly to her own fame. Let it be that she had no love for us of the North, that republican institutions looked weak and vulgar in her eyes, and that the spectacle of our Northern prosperity had made no impression upon her; let it be that she was utterly insensible to the enthusiastic hospitality with which the whole people of the Free States had just received her young Prince, still she owed it to herself, to every event in her great history which has attested her love of liberty, and which has given her so commanding a position in the affairs of mankind,—she owed it to God and man to repel with instant and crushing contempt the insulting suspicion that she could give countenance to a movement which, under the thinly woven pretexts, which any child could see through, of an alleged right of Secession and of the Sovereignty of States, undertakes to reverse the Eternal Law of natural Right and to make human

beings, not what God Almighty made them to be, but chattels and brutes. Had she done so at the very first, had she given the world to understand at the very first symptom of this outbreak that for no material consideration could the Southern attempt to nationalize human bondage receive from her anything but her most emphatic condemnation, that attempt would have been overwhelmed with speedy and signal failure.

Indeed, if, immediately upon the emancipation of her West Indian colonies, England had made it the condition of the continuance of her friendly relations with these United States that we should follow her example and in like manner emancipate our bondsmen, it would only have been in accordance with the noble stand she had taken as the champion of Human Rights. But this, I suppose, was too much to be expected. The least, however, she could do, standing where she stood, was to see to it that no new effort was made to perpetuate the bondage of the African. Identified as she was with the Cause of the Slave, she should have frowned down at once the idea of receiving into the sisterhood of Christian nations a community deliberately basing itself on the violated rights of man. And had she done this the attempt, I repeat, would have been crushed in the bud.

But this England did not do. On the contrary, at the breaking out of the Southern Rebellion, wholly untouched by the fact of twenty millions of people rising up as one man against the outrage, England at once began to contemplate the idea of giving the hand of national fellowship to the slaveholding confederation as something more than a possibility, and forthwith placed herself in the posture of waiting and watching for an opportunity to put the idea into execution. And she has availed herself of the shortcomings of the North to excuse herself for her own dereliction from the duty which she owed, not to us, but to herself and to mankind. Because this Government, instead of closing the Southern ports, blockaded them, and thus virtually conceded to the Southern conspirators a belligerent character, England pleaded that she only followed

our example in regarding them in the same light. And because the Free States have not even yet ventured fully and squarely to assume the Anti-slavery position, to which the South has driven them in the great struggle, England and Englishmen ask, with an air of the greatest innocence, "How can you of the North expect us to sympathize with you? You are not, you say yourselves, contending against slavery." Whatever we of the North are contending for or against, however imperfectly we may state our side of the case, there cannot be the shadow of a doubt as to what the one purpose of the Slave States is. That purpose is just as plain as it is barbarian. Although the English people know nothing else about our part of the world, they cannot be ignorant of that. And if they cannot sympathize with our Northern policy or no-policy, much less can they sympathize with the aim of the South, that is, if they have any true sympathy to bestow or to withhold. Although they have no love to give us, they can have nothing but abhorrence for the unholy enterprise of the Southern slavemasters, if their hatred of Slavery be as strong as they profess, and as their whole history justifies us in supposing it to be.

But instead of manifesting any opposition to the Southern movement, instead of evincing the slightest repugnance to it, England takes without a blush the ground of neutrality; a ground which, in a contest like the present, is an absolute impossibility. Neutrality between Freedom and Bondage! That is, in plain words, England, that she may get the cotton that she has learned how to turn into bread, claims to be neither for God nor for the Devil. Oh, friends, it is no more possible for nations, though they have ruled the seas for a thousand years and girdled the globe with the ensigns of their power,—it is no more possible for them than it is for individual men to take neutral ground between freedom such as ours, and the inhuman bondage for which the South contends; between the Eternal law of Natural Justice and the violation of that law, without incurring the guilt of complicity with the violator. Whoso is not for the Right, which is now so ruthlessly assailed, is against

it. And England may profess and protest as much as she chooses, her influence is working, and will continue to work as it has already worked, to strengthen the bloodstained hands which are striving to rend in pieces the God-written charter of Human Rights. In form, she may stand aloof; in fact, she is making herself an accomplice in the crime. Blinded by her commercial interests, she has taken a false and most perilous step, perilous to her own character; a step which it will be no easy thing for her to retrace, because as it is with individuals, so is it with nations: when once they commit themselves to a position, their pride instantly blindfolds them to their error, binds them to it as with chains of iron, and then goes before them and drags them to their fall.

That we should see things as they are is the imperative necessity of the hour, and therefore, for the sake of the truth, to which, now when everything else threatens to fail us, we can alone look for guidance, the position of that nation, our amicable relations with which are in peril of being interrupted, must be seen and understood. We must not be misled. We must not be blind. We must see things as they are.

In what I am saying, I have not the shadow of a desire to stir up any animosity against our mother country. I have never yet heard of any other people from whom I could wish in preference that we had been descended. I have and can have no national prejudice to gratify. I share in common with millions of the people of the North in the sentiment of veneration for England, which we drew in with our mothers' milk, and which one lineage, and one language, and one priceless literature have tended to strengthen with our growth.

Neither have I the slightest disposition, in view of the present state of our relations with England, to act the part of an alarmist. I do not believe that the great majority of the people of this country have any desire but to remain at peace with every other nation. I do not believe that one particle of disrespect towards the flag of England had share in the act which has just kindled the Old Country into a flame; and

therefore, I do not believe that anything that has yet occurred will be accounted or appealed to as a justifying cause of war. But I cannot help seeing that England has taken a false position, false to her own honor, a position nominally neutral, but in fact and from the necessity of things, committing her to an alliance with a rebellion against the Rights of Humanity. She has placed herself, however vehemently she may disclaim it, in an attitude hostile to the North. It forces her at this moment to be the protector of rebels and slaveholders. Had she taken the high ground upon which it was due to her own history that she should stand, no rebel commissioners would have dared to set foot upon a deck of hers; or when they had, and had been taken as they have been, she would have shared our satisfaction in the seizure of traitors to God and man, and made a special acknowledgment to our Government for the rescue of her flag from dishonor. Thus false, I say, is her position, that she is forced, whether with her will or against it, to take sides with this great treason. Although nothing that has as yet occurred may be considered to justify war, so long as England stands where she is, there is perpetual danger that we shall be brought into bloody collision with her.

Notwithstanding all appearances to the contrary, up to the present hour there has existed far and wide throughout these Free States, a love of England, strong and deep, second only to the love we bear our country. How could it be otherwise? England is the native soil, the birthplace of this American nation. Thence, as from its original fountain, we drew our national life. Our intellectual being has been built up out of the strong and costly material of English thought. The soil of that country is our classic ground.

Nothing more decisively reveals the deep interest we have in England than our extreme sensitiveness to English opinions of us. Men care little for judgments passed upon them by those whom they neither respect nor love, to whom they are wholly indifferent. What travellers from other countries,

France or Germany, coming among us, say or write about us, receives little of our regard, however wise and just it may be. But the remarks of English travellers instantly attract our attention, and an importance is attached to them out of all proportion to their worth. It is true we have become a little hardened against English criticism, as it was very desirable we should be. The time has been when it seemed as if the American character were losing all pretensions to any dignity or self-respect, so sensitive were we to what Englishmen and Englishwomen said of us, and into such unmanly exhibitions of chagrin and indignation were we driven by any word of slight or ridicule from English lips. It seemed at one time as if we depended for our very existence upon what was thought of us in that quarter. I do not think that in all history can be found any parallel to the strong affection of the people of this free North for England. It is native to us. Two wars and occasional misunderstandings, such as will sometimes occur among the nearest of kin, have not been able to extinguish it.

And of late years we have been insensibly growing in the belief that the affection we have so long and so fervently cherished for the old country was reciprocated; that, as we had so long looked with admiring eyes upon England, England was beginning to regard this country with a new and kindly interest. We flattered ourselves that our rapid growth and unexampled prosperity, and the many and valuable contributions which this country has made to the arts of life were beginning to tell in our favor, and win for us her cordial respect, and that she was really learning to regard us with something of the affection which we cherished for her; that she was finding out that life in this quarter of the world was not altogether mean and vulgar. And when she sent her young Prince to visit us, we took it as a signal token of her respect. With what heartiness he was received you all freshly remember. So far as his reception by our people was concerned, there was nothing, until he entered a slave State, to remind him that he had passed the boundaries of the dominions of

his mother. Indeed, so hearty was that reception, that some of us were so romantic as to expect that the Prince and his attendants would carry back such a report of the goodwill towards England, so cordially expressed by these Northern States, that a marked advance would instantly be made by the people of the old country in their regard for us, and that we should soon thereafter find that they were at least improving in their geographical knowledge, and were finding out where Washington stands, and New York and Boston. But it seems now that the Prince and his attendant noblemen took all our attentions as the due of their rank, and never interpreted them as the signs, which they simply were, of our veneration, not for their tinsel stars and ribbons, but for the great English nation, whose representatives these persons were. In fact, some of the leading political writers of England sneeringly attributed the enthusiasm with which the Prince was welcomed here, not to any regard for England, but to an American fondness for shows.

Not only the slight impression which the warmth of that welcome made upon the English mind, but much that has occurred since: the interpretation of our legislation, as if it were intended to put an affront upon her, and as if England, in all her laws of trade, had always been studiously careful of the interests of other nations; and particularly her bearing towards us since the breaking out of our present great trouble, forces upon us the mortifying conviction that England does not love us, that she has never dreamed of reciprocating our fervent regards. While our evident and rapidly growing power has awed her into bating her breath in the expression of her contempt, she has not been able to conceal not only that she has not loved us, but that she regards us with secret dislike. She has not been able to hide her desire that this Republic should be broken up.

We need not have waited for a state of things like the present, to disclose to us the feelings with which the English people have looked upon us. We might very safely have in-

ferred their dislike of us from the ignorance in which they have persisted in wrapping themselves up in regard not only to our political institutions, but even to the most obvious facts of our geography. When we have committed any offence against good manners, and betrayed any vulgarity, they have been quick to note and to publish it, but English eyes have been studiously averted from the map of the United States. They have been too much annoyed by its size to bear to examine its details, or to take note of those features of it which, with our institutions, and our blood, make it the map of One Nation, One and Indivisible. The English are pre-eminently an enlightened people. They ransack every department of human knowledge. What is there that escapes them? Their gross ignorance of this country, then, can be accounted for only upon the supposition that it is a subject for which they have no fondness but a positive aversion.

And when we pause over this English dislike of us, the reason of it soon becomes apparent. Although it may be creditable to our good nature, it is mortifying to our sagacity that we should ever have overlooked it. How could it possibly have been otherwise, than that England should regard us as she has done? The existence of a populous and prosperous Republic,—of a great successful country, without a throne, without a nobility, without an established church,—how could we ever have been so foolish as to imagine that such a spectacle could be pleasing in the eyes of those, in whose very blood it is to believe that without kings, lords, and bishops, any decent civilization is impossible?

My friends, the prosperity, the existence of this country, with its free, democratic institutions, is a standing menace to every form of monarchical government in Christendom, and it furnishes all living under such forms, who feel their oppressive power with an impregnable ground of opposition. Why, if it were not for the horrible bondage which we have cherished within our borders, the like of which for barbarity exists in no other Christian country even the most despotic, and which has palsied

our influence, we should long since have revolutionized every nation in Europe ; and this not by any active interference in their affairs, but by the bare fact of our existence. What oppressive mode of government could have stood before the fact of millions of human beings, living here in such freedom and unprecedented activity and rare harmony as our social institutions foster? Is it any wonder that England does not like us? How thoughtless in us to imagine that she should; or that the prospect of our overthrow could fail to give her satisfaction! Of all the nations of the earth, she is most susceptible of our influence, because we both have one language and are of one blood. It is impossible that she should regard us with the cordiality which she would be sure to feel for us, were we upholding a form of society like her own. The more we have loved and revered England, thus showing that neither wars nor differences of any sort have been able to extinguish our goodwill towards her, and in this respect proving that our liberal institutions do not encourage the growth of national prejudices, the more difficult has it been for her to return our friendship.

I have dwelt thus somewhat at length upon the relations in which we stand to our mother country, because the perils and portents of the hour render them deeply interesting. It is well to know our friends. We are threatened with war by England. It would be a great calamity. And although, as I have already remarked, I do not believe that the special circumstances that occasion the threat, are sufficient to justify its execution, it is needful that we should understand the temper of that country towards us. England occupies, as we have seen, a false position towards these Free Northern States. And in relation to us, as we have also seen, she has no goodwill to spare. That she has, with all her mighty armament, a growing aversion to war we may believe. If such a long and terrible experience of bereavement and debt as she has had in the bloody art has been lost upon her, we may well despair of the education of nations. At least that England will not precipitate a war, we may reasonably trust. But we are not per-

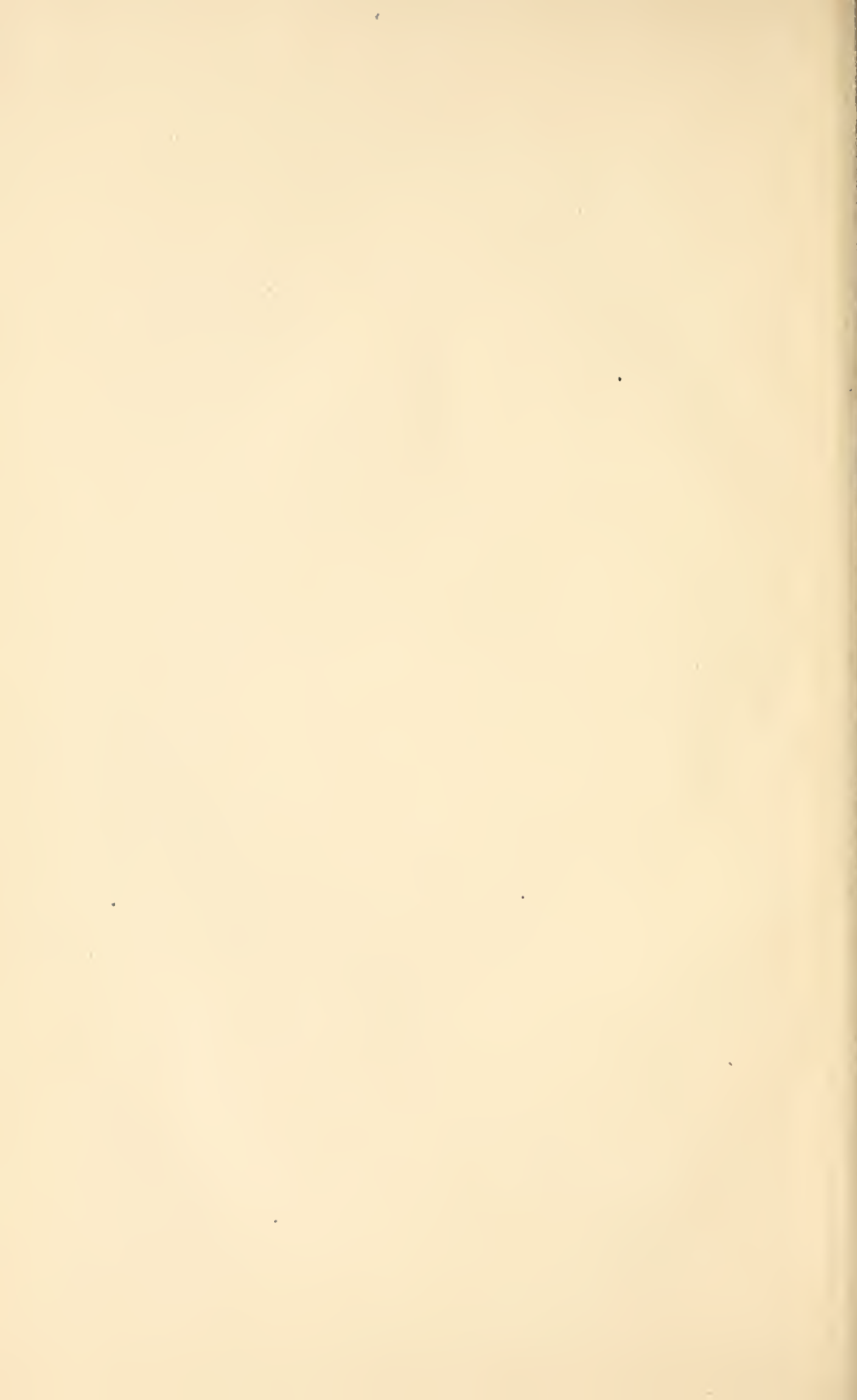
mitted to put any reliance upon her kindly feeling towards us. It will become our Government to use the utmost caution, because we can count upon no goodwill of hers to put the best construction upon any indiscreet word. Having no love for us, England will be slow to believe that we can have any consideration for her. Already the English Press is talking as if we had an intention of picking a quarrel with her! as if, whatever might be our intentions at other times, we could entertain such unutterable folly now, or have any but the most anxious desire, at this most painful juncture, to maintain friendly relations with all foreign governments. Such being the spirit of the English people, although the present cloud may pass, God only knows how soon another and darker cloud may arise, especially in such a stormy time, and so long as England maintains her present ground, which, however strenuously she may affirm to be a ground of peace, commits her to the side of the Rebellion.

It must also be fully seen by us that the fierce and terrible conflict that has arisen on this soil concerns not so much any local and temporary interests of ours as those sacred principles of Justice and Liberty, which, in the eternal nature of things, most deeply concern all nations, every human being. Our Maker has so fashioned us, that nothing takes so mighty a hold upon us as Justice and Freedom. They meet the deepest and most essential want of our nature. These it is that alone give attraction to human history, value to human life. And since the world began, never has there been a conflict in which the purest Right and the blackest Wrong have been so directly opposed to one another, with scarcely any side issues to complicate the bloody controversy, as in this struggle in which we are now engaged. It must needs be that it will, as it proceeds, command the attention of mankind as no other war has ever done. It cannot be otherwise than that men will hold their breath as they look on and see the powers of darkness and of light in deadly conflict. That other nations should altogether stand aloof seems hardly possible. We have the deepest interest in the strife, but it is profoundly interesting

to the whole race of man. The well-being of the world is at stake, and it is not impossible that the world may plunge into the strife. It must be borne in mind too, that the impression has gone abroad among the ignorant foreign masses, that the Republic, never so strong in manhood, never so worthy of honor as at this hour, is tottering to its fall. Every fowl bird of prey then will be whetting the beak. Where the carcass is supposed to be, there the vultures will be gathered together.

And, therefore, the responsibility that is laid upon us, who are summoned to do battle for God and human Liberty, is unspeakably solemn; and we must see to it, that we do not belittle and dishonor the great Cause in the eyes of the world by any short-sighted policy, by any time-serving expediency. It is no time to postpone and evade. We must confront the sacred issues and rise, every soul of us, to the height of the great argument. Especially, before it will be too late, we must, as we can, make England see the false position she has taken, and retreat from it. Sore as may be her need of the Southern staple, and blind as she now seems to be to everything but that, and savagely as from recent accounts her old thirst of conquest and of power is beginning to stir her proud people, she cannot yet be prepared to assume deliberately and in form, the Protectorate of African bondage. We may at least hope that she will range herself, where alone she properly belongs, on the side of human freedom, when the great North, standing erect now in its strength, shall, with a bold hand, fling out into the heavens the glorious banner of Universal Emancipation. In the meanwhile, let no man of us be blind to the solemnity of the time. It calls for all our thoughtfulness and all our manhood. We need the inspiration of faith,—faith in God and in man; we need faith in the prayer that, beyond the power of words, should kindle an undying flame in our hearts. May God prepare this offering now, the spirit of self-sacrifice, of holiness, and of humanity, upon the altar within, and keep it burning there forever!







LIBRARY OF CONGRESS



0 012 026 296 8

